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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the responses of English primary schools to the changes imposed on them by the introduction of the National Curriculum. The study first focused on schools' management strategies and their impact on the school's management culture. A second focus was on the relationship of the school and its headteacher with external agencies. Data were obtained from two rounds of interviews, conducted first in 1990 and again in 1992, with 48 headteachers at 48 English primary schools. A comparison of the 1992 responses with those of 1990 indicate that headteachers shifted from a collegial management style toward a more directive approach, although collegiality remained the predominant style. In 1990, for example, 60 percent of headteachers used a collegial leadership style; in 1992, 46 percent did so. Second, the schools also shifted from a mediation approach with external agencies to one of compliance with the mandated changes. Schools with more directive management tended to be making substantial changes, and those with more collegial/participative management were more likely to focus on developing their own change strategies. Three tables are included. (LMI)

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SYMPOSIUM: FINDING THE KEYS TO EDUCATIONAL REFORM

COERCION OR COMPROMISE: HOW SCHOOLS REACT TO IMPOSED CHANGE

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Introduction

In this paper we are concerned with two facets of the responses of English primary schools to the changes imposed upon them by the introduction of the National Curriculum. The first concern is with the way in which the changes required by the National Curriculum were handled within the school. In particular, we are concerned with management strategies and the impact on the managerial culture of the school. Aspects of this managerial culture include, on the one hand, a shift to a more directive and coercive approach by headteachers in order to achieve change, and on the other hand to the experience of collaborative activity by school staff under the head's leadership. The possibilities under consideration are that reacting to imposed change has the potential to be both empowering and disempowering for teachers.

The second concern is with the relationship of the school and its headteacher with external agencies impacting on it. While the National Curriculum represented an imposition of centralised control over schools, other educational developments were claimed to have made schools more autonomous and self-managing.

The data presented in this paper are derived from two rounds of interviews with 48 headteachers of primary schools. The paper therefore considers the experience of imposed change from the headteachers' perspective and depends upon their own accounts.

Strategies for Change

A traditional model of the primary school as an organisation emphasises, on the one hand, the individual autonomy of the teacher in the classroom, and, on the other, the individual autonomy of the headteacher with regard to the management of the school. Teachers worked on their own in their own classes on a rather isolated basis and had relative autonomy with regard to the learning of their pupils. A number of studies of primary education have drawn attention to this rather solitary nature of teaching as an activity and to the way in which many teachers rarely saw colleagues teach or worked collaboratively with them (eg Galton, Simon and Croll, 1980). Paralleling this individualistic model of the teacher in the classroom is the individualistic model of the

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headteacher as responsible for the school. In their study, Understanding Schools as Organisations, Handy and Aitken (1986) describe a typical model of primary school organisation as one which revolves around a single authority figure using a very personal approach to management and a notion of 'his' or 'her' school. An example of this individual and personal approach to school management can be found in an NFER study of streaming and de-streaming in primary schools conducted in the late 1960s (Barker Lunn, 1970). Three case studies of schools making the decision to stream or de-stream are described. In one the head saw each teacher individually to explain the decision. In another the head announced the decision by a notice pinned up in the staffroom. In the third the staff 'had to find out for themselves'! Staff apparently accepted these arrangements as natural. A teacher is quoted as saying:

> 'When streaming was introduced it was without consultation, which the head, of course, had a perfect right to do.' (Barker Lunn, 1970, pp 255-271)

The fact that such arrangements now sound an extraordinary way to manage a major change in school practice reflects two developments in the organisation and management of primary schools. The first can be broadly described as managerialism and the second as collegiality. These developments have different emphases but also points of overlap and both turn our attention away from the very individualistic model of the school as an organisation.

In terms of the broad analytic themes employed in the PACE study, managerialism relates to the operation of power as something imposed on teachers, while collegiality relates to the operation of power in a way that can be collectively empowering. However, these are not simple dichotomies. Collegial solutions may come about as part of a management strategy by headteachers and others and certainly does not imply an absence of management. Thus, 'managerialism' must be understood as only one of the ways in which management may operate.

We see managerialism as a bureaucratic solution to the problem of bringing coherence and direction into organisational activities. It emphasises formal structures, the explicit and public delineation of organisation structures and purposes, and of roles and responsibilities within it. In primary schools, management-centred approaches have led to greater differentiation of staffing, for example, through the use of posts with particular designated responsibilities for areas of the curriculum and attempts to direct in-service work to reflect identified school needs rather than the individual interests of teachers. Such developments are not incompatible with participative and collective approaches to school development but they can imply a directive and controlled model of primary schools which impinges on some of class-teachers' professional autonomy.

Collegiality is a difficult and somewhat contentious concept which we have used to describe those approaches to managing primary schools which emphasise the common and cooperative aspects of teachers' work. It is a response to the relative isolation of much of what teachers do which looks to develop schools by encouraging school staff to work together in a collective approach to school development, rather than by treating staff as 'human resources' to be managed more and more 'effectively'.. Studies such as those of Nias and her colleagues (Nias, Southworth and Yeomans, 1989 and Nias, Southworth and Campbell, 1992) have described a 'culture of collaboration' as the

prevailing organisational style in a number of primary schools. This culture does not dispense with leadership from the headteacher and often derives from the head's approach, but it places emphasis on whole school staff approaches to developing schools collectively. In such approaches, when moving away from purely individualistic notions of teachers' work, a degree of autonomy is surrendered collaboratively rather than managerially.

These distinctions between managerial and collegial approaches to management emerged clearly in the interviews with headteachers, although it must be emphasised that the discussion below is based on the accounts we were given rather than on direct observation in schools.

Headteachers and teachers were asked a series of questions about their personal and their schools' strategies for implementing changes associated with the National Curriculum. As was apparent from the discussion above, issues of managerialism, collegiality and so on are not easy to operationalise in a straightforward manner and the analysis of approaches to managing change draws upon answers to several questions. Heads were asked about their personal approach to their leadership role in the school and also about their schools' strategies for managing change in response to the National Curriculum. Their answers to these questions were recorded in an open-ended fashion and then coded. For our analysis, heads were located on the basis of these coded responses on a continuum which was defined in terms of a 'more managerially directed' or 'more collegial approach' to managing change.

At one end of the continuum are headteachers who identified the school's strategy for change as essentially top-down. These headteachers have been located at the directed end on the continuum. It should be noted that these heads did not typically see this top-down approach in simple terms. Most of them also emphasised that they involved staff fully in consultation and often that they also relied on a senior management team. However, all these heads firmly emphasised their personal role and the importance of centrally directed change on the way the school had responded to the National Curriculum. Comments were made such as:

> 'These are changes for which I am legally responsible, I want to carry the staff with me but in the end it has to happen and I have to make it happen.'

> 'The time scale really does not allow for much discussion. My approach has always been that I carry the can and so I decide.'

> 'Much change was needed and I had to impose it. I probably went too fast but I did try to communicate.'

Such statements indicated an approach which relied on the head or the head and a few senior colleagues, to carry changes through.

Heads were sometimes conscious of having moved into a more directive and authoritarian mode:

'When I came here I was very autocratic in the 'charismatic head' tradition. I have mellowed but have needed to go back to that to some extent.'

'Decisions are now made by me to a much greater extent than in the past. I have to meet legal obligation and have had to impose decisions in order to do it.'

Another element of some of the responses of heads who identified their approach as a top-down one was a concern to protect staff from the stress and pressure of making difficult and sometimes unwelcome decisions. There was a concern among some heads to insulate staff and protect them from the responsibility of decisions which might conflict with educational values. For instance;

'I'd rather they grumbled at me than (have them) feeling they have let the children down'.

'It's my responsibility to run the school and make decisions. I think the staff are pleased that I have taken responsibility.'

A middle point on the continuum was identified in terms of heads who emphasised the collective and consultative aspects of the way the school went about responding to the National Curriculum, but also emphasised that, because the final responsibility was theirs, the final say had to be theirs. These headteachers were similar to those identified as 'top-down' in terms of the stress they placed on the role of the head in making sure that changes happened in an appropriate fashion. However, they differed from them in terms of emphasising that the heads' role was to guarantee effective change, rather than necessarily to direct it. We have described this approach to management as 'managed participation'.

The following comments illustrate managed participation:

'Our natural priorities are child-centred and I support the staff in this. But in the end I have to make sure that we conform with the legislation.'

'It is not an autocratic approach. I take the lead but we work as a staff. I try to lead by example.'

'I have to be a leader but it is important to take the staff with me. I am influenced by staff views.'

A third group of heads came closest to the collegial model of school management. These heads were clear that they were leaders in the school, but wanted to be leaders of a group of colleagues working together. They emphasised the collective and participative approach within the school and the way in which all colleagues were involved in decision making. An aspect of the way these heads saw their role was in facilitating the changes the staff saw as necessary and as helping the teachers to work together. A number of heads referred to 'democratic' leadership styles and others were aware of the limitations on what they could achieve if they were not working collaboratively with the staff.

'It is a consultative one (management approach). We are very much a democracy. I do not want to make decisions without consultation. It is important to be able to say to staff, 'We decided this'.'

'Basic approach is collegiate. It is not quite democratic but with a strong emphasis on consultation and decision making by staff. The staff need to have ownership of change if it is to work.'

'We work as a team. Democracy is time-consuming but is worth it.'

In Table 1 headteachers have been categorised along this continuum from 'top-down management' through 'managed participation' to 'managed collegiality'. A small number of heads could not be classified in this way either because of very limited responses to these questions or because of idiosyncratic responses which did not relate to the dimension. Heads were categorised independently in terms of their response in the first interview and in the second interview. The column entries in Table 1 are based on the 1990 interviews and the row entries are based on the 1992 interviews. This makes it possible to look at the distribution of management approaches in the two years and also the shifts between them.

The overall figures for 1990 are the column totals at the foot of the Table and it can be seen that in 1990, by far the largest group of heads were categorised as 'collegial' in their management style. Twenty-nine heads, 60.4% of the total were categorised in this way. A further 12, 25.0% of all heads, were categorised as responding to change through 'managed participation' and only two had a 'top-down' approach to managing change. A further five headteachers did not describe their practice in ways that allowed them to be placed in one of these categories.

A comparison of the figures derived from the 1992 interviews with the figures from these in 1990 shows something of a shift away from collegial and participative approaches and towards more directed approaches, although participation and collegiality still predominated. The 1992 figures are the row totals on the extreme right of the Table. While sixty per cent of heads were collegial in 1990, this had reduced in 1992 to 22 or 45.6%. In contrast, the number of heads describing their approach as top-down had trebled to six, although this is still only 12.5% of the total.

The cell entries in Table 1 show the individual changes which contributed to this aggregate shift in approach. Entries on the diagonal of the table (from top left to bottom right) represent headteachers whose strategies had remained constant over the two years. Other entries represent changes from the category identified by the column in which they are locked, into the category identified by the row in which they have moved from a collegial management strategy a managed participation strategy. This analysis shows that, whilst there had not been a wholesale shift in management strategies by heads, a minority had moved towards a rather more directed managerial strategy. Three heads had moved from collegial management or managed participation approaches to a top-down approach, and five had moved from a collegial to a managed participation approach. Only one head had moved in the other direction, from managed participation to a collegial approach.

The relative consistency of the categorisation of management strategies over the two

years gives confidence that what is being described is a reflection of real differences in school approaches which can be captured in interviews. The approaches are fairly stable over time and they have shifted in a fashion which suggest similar pressures on schools and heads. In both rounds of interviews a substantial majority of heads were placing emphasis on staff involvement and consultation as their strategy for managing change, although in some cases they emphasised that this was a 'managed' involvement. However, the experience of implementing the National Curriculum has tended to push at least some heads in the direction of a more managed and more top-down approach to change.

The limitations of our data cause us to be cautious about interpreting these findings too much but two underlying factors can be identified. First, there is what we shall call a 'work experience' factor. On this, we have in mind the gradual divergence in role expertise and experience of class-teachers and headteachers. Whilst these were, in a sense, fairly close in the past, the Education Reform Act has caused significant differentiation. Headteacher concerns with management, finance and accountability are a long way from the classroom concerns of their staff. At the same time, the latter became expert, in a way that most headteachers were not, in the details of attainment targets, programmes of study, assessment procedures and other technical necessities of the National Curriculum. A more distanced form of management reflected the realities of these changed forms of work experience. The second interpretive factor which we offer we shall call 'headteacher survival'. It is almost impossible to underestimate the quantity of paperwork, regulation and administration which was passed to headteachers over the period of study and the escalation in their responsibilities as LEA powers and support structures were weakened. In this context, becoming more 'top-down' is a form of coping strategy rather than an indicator of a fundamental change in values.

In summary, the within-school approaches analysed here indicate a movement on a dimension of managerial imposition - participative negotiation in the direction of a greater imposition, although more schools were still located towards the participative end of this dimension. There was also an movement away from individualist, and towards more collective ways of achieving change.

Strategies for change and the substance of change

School strategies for change reflect management and organisational strategies but will also reflect (and may in turn influence) the substance of the changes being made. Such changes also involved a complex set of responses in terms of the impact on working practices and the relationship of change to the values and identity of the school. We can identify a dimension relating to power in the educational system posed as compliance-meditation -resistance - denoting a range of school responses to externally imposed change. We have considered aspects of the impact of change on schools using these concepts to classify the types of response to emerge from interviews with the headteachers. However, none of the heads interviewed could be classified as resisting or contesting change. The responses either emphasised the extent to which changes were being incorporated into previous practice (a form of mediation) or were superseding previous practice (compliance).

As we saw earlier, a fairly typical initial response of headteachers (and teachers) to the National Curriculum was that much of it was an extension of existing good practice.

Breadth of curriculum coverage, careful curriculum planning and recording, assessment of pupils progress and so on, strongly related to the ways in which they saw their work and the work of their staff.

> 'We have tried to be true to our own philosophy. We do not want to change the basic system and have not had to change radically. It is been possible to keep our basic approach.'

> 'There is a sense of achievement that we have influenced how the National Curriculum works here. The sense of something out of our control has gone.'

> 'We were all well aware of what was coming and were also confident of our own practice. We can take it in our stride. I think we were well placed to cope with change.'

These are the sort of approaches which we have characterised as 'mediation'. This does not necessarily mean that little change was planned or that the heads were happy about the way in which the National Curriculum was imposed. However, they emphasised the continuity between their existing practice and what was required of them.

The National Curriculum impacted more radically on those schools whose strategies we have characterised as 'compliance'. Headteachers of such schools emphasised the scale of the changes which would be necessary and also emphasised the disjunction and discontinuity between their response to the National Curriculum and their previous practice. These heads saw the impact of the National Curriculum in terms of relatively fundamental changes which would be necessary and saw implementation very much as a response to external requirements rather than as a development of internal practice.

Comments such as:

> 'It had had to be completely different. We are now subject dominated which is the reverse of previous practice.'

> 'Much change was needed and I had to impose it.'

It should be noted that this was not always a hostile reaction from headteachers although it certainly was in some cases. Some heads saw the National Curriculum as a lever which they could use to make changes which they judged needed making and where they had encountered resistance in the past. One recently appointed headteacher expressed this in term of:

> 'There are lot of changes happening, almost a reversal of some practices, but most of it is for the better. To some extent I have used this (the National Curriculum) to get the school moving.'

However others saw the changes in much more negative terms:

> 'It is been like going over Niagara Falls - going over and coming up again - battered against the rocks.'

In Tables 2a and 2b, types of management style described above are cross-tabulated against the extent to which schools' responses to change were categorised as 'mediation' or 'compliance'. A comparison of the marginal entries (on the extreme right of the table) for 1990 with those for 1992 shows the extent of the shift over the period in school perspectives. In the initial round of interviews more than four-fifths of the heads interviewed described their responses to the National Curriculum in terms that were best characterised as 'mediation'. They stressed the aspects of continuity and the way that many of the requirements were developments of existing good practice. Only just over one in ten of heads described a response which involved abandoning existing practice and making radical changes in order to comply with the National Curriculum.

However, in the second round of interviews, although mediation and incorporation into current practice was the most common response, it did not predominate to anything like the extent it had earlier. Half of heads gave responses in the second round which could be described as mediation while two fifths of heads now responded in terms which were best described as compliance. (Only those headteachers whose management approaches could be categorised are included in this analysis.)

It is clear that in the period between the two sets of interviews, the experience of implementing the National Curriculum had dented some headteachers' optimism that it could be regarded as an extension of good practice and had pushed a number of schools in the direction of greater changes and a greater discontinuity with previous practice than initially anticipated.

Tables 2a and 2b also make it possible to look at the inter-relationships of mediation-compliance as strategies and the overall school approach to change. In 1990 very few schools had identified a basically top-down approach to the management of change and the great majority had identified an incorporative, mediation approach to its substance. However, the two schools with top-down approaches had also identified a relatively major and discontinuous impact on their practice and had been categorised as having an approach based on compliance. In contrast, all of the schools with a change strategy based on 'managed participation' and four-fifths of those with 'collegial' strategies had a mediative response to the substance of change based on the development of practice.

The figures for schools using 'top-down' approaches are based on very small numbers, but the same overall pattern emerges in the figures for 1992. In the data from 1992 there is an overall shift towards 'top-down' management strategies and towards a process of 'compliance' rather than 'mediation' of the National Curriculum changes. There were then six heads whose approach was categorised as 'top-down' and two-thirds of them described a process of compliance in response to the National Curriculum. Only one of these heads described their changes as an mediation through current practice. In contrast, nearly two-thirds of the heads using collegial strategies for change described their approach as incorporation and about a third described their approach as 'compliance'. The heads whose strategy for managing change was characterised as 'managed participation' also fell between the other groups in terms of their relative emphasis on 'mediation' and 'compliance'.

In summary, in the period covered by the two rounds of data collection, schools shifted from an approach to managing change which placed strong emphasis on collegial and

participatory approaches towards placing more emphasis on managerial and directed approaches. In the same period they also shifted from stressing the way that the National Curriculum could be mediated and incorporated by building on existing practice to placing more emphasis on discontinuities with past practice and the extent of changes which were being made. These two dimensions of response are clearly related: schools which had more directed and managerial strategies also experienced the most substantial change while schools which had collegial and participative strategies were most likely to emphasise the process of developing and building on their existing practice.

These two shifts occurred at the same period of time and, in each round of interviews the management style and the extent of change were strongly related. It is therefore tempting to look for a relationship between the two parallel shifts over time. The most obvious causal explanation is that the experience of finding that more radical change was required, pushed headteachers into more directive and managerial strategies. Alternatively, it is possible that schools which had more directive approaches to change found that these moved them in a more radical direction.
The data from the present study do not provide an unambiguous answer to the question of causality and its direction although there is more support for the first explanation than for the second. In the first round of data collection very few schools were identified as having a top-down approach to managing change so there is relatively little scope for such an approach to create a shift from mediation to compliance. On the other hand there are collegial strategies which are associated with compliance in the first round of interviews and which could be associated with a move to a more top-down approach. However, examining the data from the individual schools involved does not reveal a clear cut relationship. It is certainly not the case that all the schools identified as undertaking major change in 1990 had found it necessary to move to a more directed approach by 1992 and shifts to more directed approaches were made by schools which were incorporating change in both rounds of data collection. Thus, although we can conclude that, at each of the points in time studied, more radical breaks with previous practice were associated with more directive approaches, we cannot conclude that the shift to more directive approaches was caused by the extent of change.

In terms of the operation of power in the educational system and the dimensions of power we have used, we can identify changes both in power over schools and power within them. The great majority of headteachers had experienced a reduction in their autonomy and felt more external constraints and controls. This sense of loss of autonomy grew during the time scale of the research. Although there was scope for school-based and negotiated developments, the sense of external imposition predominated. Within schools there was a shift from more participatory and collaborative to more directive modes of accomplishing changes. However, despite this shift, there was still an emphasis on participation - although often with a strong managerial emphasis. While some headteachers were conscious of having developed more directive ways of working, others had experienced the achievement of considerable collaborative change with staff. In virtually all schools there was a move away from teacher individualism.

Table 1 **Management strategies for change**

Management strategies for change		1990				
		Top-down management	Managed participation	Collegial management	Mixed/ unclear	Total for 1990
1992	Top-down management	2	2	1	1	6 (12.5%)
	Managed participation	0	7	5	1	13 (27.1%)
	Collegial management	0	1	21	0	22 (45.8%)
	Mixed/unclear	0	2	2	3	7 (14.6%)
	Totals for 1992	2 (4.2%)	12 (25.0%)	29 (60.4%)	5 (10.4%)	

Table 2a Strategies for management and the accommodation of change (1990)

Strategies for change	Management Strategies 1990			
	Top -down management	Managed participation	Collegial management	Total for 1990
Mediation	0	12 (100%)	23 (79.3%)	35 (81.4%)
Compliance	2 (100%)	0	3 (10.3%)	5 (11.6%)
Mixed/unclear	0	0	3 (10.3%)	3 (7.0%)

Table 2b Strategies for management and the accommodation of change (1992)

Strategies for change	Management strategies 1992			
	Top-down management	Managed participation	Collegial management	Totals for 1992
Mediation	1 (16.7%)	6 (46.2%)	14 (63.6%)	21 (51.2%)
Compliance	4 (66.7%)	5 (38.5%)	7 (31.8%)	16 (39.0%)
Mixed/unclear	1 (16.7%)	2 (15.4%)	1 (4.5%)	4 (9.8%)